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## **Class Consciousness and the Culture of Dissent in WWII British Literature**

**By: Kristin Schall**

The common conception of England during World War II is one of people coming together as a collective force to win the war. While on one level this is true, what people neglect to recognize is that alongside the diligent war effort there was also a thriving culture of dissent. It's not to say that these dissenters were Nazi sympathizers, this is not in any way the case. Their dissent came from a place much different than sympathy for the enemy. It came from sympathy for the British working people. It is this class consciousness that made them question the manner in which the government handled the war.

These dissenters included many writers some of whom are still prominent today such as Graham Greene, Virginia Woolf and George Orwell, and lesser known authors like J.B. Priestley. These artists used their writing as a vehicle of dissent to get their dissatisfaction across at a time of great censorship. This was particularly the case for George Orwell and J.B. Priestley. The primary goal in both of these writers' work was to make their political dissatisfaction and personal ideologies known. To do this they capitalized on the allegorical possibilities of the novel. Their stories function as both warnings to the public and calls to action and are constructed in a way that while being appealing to a mass population also had political impact. To illustrate how this use of form to convey ideology and the class consciousness of the writers I am going to look at several works by Orwell and Priestley. Together they will serve to illustrate the existence of a dissent culture existing in the midst of a popular war. For George Orwell I will use

the war time novels *Coming up for Air* (1939), *Animal Farm* (1945), and the post war *1984* (1949) to illustrate his use of the novel form as well as his class consciousness and ideas about the future of England. The works of Priestly that will be referred to are *Let the People Sing* (1939), *Black out in Gretley* (1942), and *Three Men in New Suits* (1945). By using these two authors I hope to show the misconception of World War II as a people's war and reveal a thriving culture of dissent and class consciousness.

By the beginning of World War II George Orwell had made clear his position on British Empire and government tyranny through his work. He was a socialist, no matter how disillusioned with it he became. He had experienced empire first hand working as a police officer in Burma and experienced what the system does to a person. In spite of his upper class Eaton education he viewed himself as a champion of the working class and had sympathy for their position. This is seen in his everyman main characters who struggle against a system that doesn't work for them. Orwell used his writing to expose these struggles. By adopting a writing style that was meant to be accessible to common people he was able to get his message across to the masses.

Throughout the much censored war time Orwell was able to get his work published though he did experience the tyranny of censorship, when because of England's alliance with the Soviet Union, *Animal Farm* was not allowed to be published. It was later published after the English, Soviet alliance ended. Of his war time novels *Coming up for Air* is probably most clearly about class in England and the effects of modernizing. The novel follows George Bowling, a middle class insurance salesman, as he attempts to break away from his suffocating suburban life of mortgage payments, a nagging wife and rambunctious children. To do this he goes to visit the town he grew up

in only to find it completely changed. The novel illustrates the discontent of the middle class and the effects the demands of modern society have on them.

Orwell paints a morose picture of suburban life which pervades all aspects of it from family interactions to workplace interactions. He describes it as unstable, of having the realization that you are one missed payment away from losing everything. These concerns are present in the characterization of George's wife, Hilda. Orwell writes,

She's one of those people who get their main kick in life out of foreseeing disasters. Only petty disasters of course. As for wars, earthquakes, plagues, famines and revolutions, she pays no attention to them. Butter is going up, and the gas-bill is enormous, and the kids' boots are wearing out and there's another installment due on the radio—that's Hilda's litany (7-8).

Hilda's concerns are concerns that are present throughout the middle class. There is a constant worry about how to pay for what they have in order to keep it. They have no time to concern themselves with the bigger issues of war, earthquakes etc. This clearly illustrates the strains that capitalism puts on the middle class. On one hand there is pressure to have a nice house with a radio but on the other there isn't really enough money for it all. Everything is bought on credit and the bills make people as George points out later, "devoted slaves forever," to the credit companies (15). These small passages illustrate Orwell's understanding of the unique struggle of the middle class. He sees credit for what it is, a system of control. When people owe money on everything they own they are forced to be concerned only with money and their attention is taken away from social and political concerns.

In addition to monetary concerns, what pervades the life of people in the middle class is fear. This fear is present in every aspect of life from the fear of losing everything, their job, their house, to the fears imposed by the media and propaganda. This is illustrated in the book with a scene in a shop. George sees a young girl being berated by her boss and thinks, “Why do they stand it? [...] One back-answer and you get the sack” (17). This thought is continued later when he observes, “Fear! We swim in it. It’s out element. Everyone that isn’t scared stiff of losing his job is scared stiff of war, or Fascism, or Communism, or something” (18). These two thoughts sum up the feelings of most people. Order is kept by forcing people into fear. When they are scared they don’t act. People don’t stand up to their boss because they fear losing their job and they don’t stand up to their government because they fear for their livelihood. Orwell, having experienced having the duty to impose fear in people, understood this and isn’t subtle in his attack on it.

Another understanding of Orwell’s that is subtly present in the book is the build up to World War II. He is careful to point out the bombers flying over head and to give this subtle understanding to his character. George imagines the air raid sirens and thinks of what the streets will look like after the fighting starts. He thinks of the impending war, “Is it going to happen? No knowing. Some days it’s impossible to believe it. Some days I say to myself that it’s just a scare got up by the newspapers. Some days I know it in my bones there’s no escaping it” (31). Orwell, through George, is able to capture the minds of the people. The idea of war being so abstract, yet concrete at the same time and the fear of it is a major concern in their life to the point of being able to hear the sirens and picture the change that will come to the streets. This is made all the more concrete when

later George goes with his wife to a meeting about “The Menace of Fascism.” He sees the speech for what it is, fear mongering. He reflects “just like a gramophone. Turn the handle, press the button and it starts. Democracy, Fascism, Democracy” (171). Though he sees through the propaganda he also has a sense of what is going on. He sees war for what it is and what it isn’t. George understands that war is not glorious and is a reaction to the fear. His real concern is after the war, the coming of the “hate-world, slogan-world” (176). He sees that the world will become full of propaganda and hate and it is this that frightens him most. His concerns however are quickly undercut when he remembers his position thinking,

At that moment the destiny of Europe seemed to me more important then the rent and the kids’ school-bills and the work I’d have to do tomorrow. For anyone who had to earn his living such thought are just plain foolish. But they didn’t move out of my mind. Still the vision of the coloured shirts and the machine-guns rattling. The last thing I remember wondering before I fell asleep was why the hell a chap like me should care (189).

George desires his concerns to be with the fate of his continent but he realizes that they can’t. That he must worry about school bills and working.

Through George, Orwell is able to create a vivid picture of the British middle class. They are a class that no matter how much they want to get involved can’t because they have concerns that keep them from engaging in politics. They know the war will be started by those in power and fought by the young men and that their middle class existence will go on being the same as ever. This characterization is a troubling one. The fact that life has put such a strain on these people that they can no longer care about

anything other than their family is evidence of the concern Orwell felt for British society. The lack of engagement of the common people gives way to falling prey to propaganda and creates a society where the people are not engaged in life only going through the motions. By giving themselves over to the forces of society the people make themselves susceptible to the powers of the government and the possibility of that government becoming corrupt.

This concern about totalitarianism is clearly illustrated in *Animal Farm*. This novel is often interpreted simply as an anti-communist tract but to read it in these simple terms is to take away the depth of the novel. To begin with it is not anti-communist it is anti-Stalin and anti-totalitarianism. At its most basic it is about the USSR and the betrayal of the working people by Stalin. However, the depth of the story is that Stalin can be replaced with any leader who has betrayed his country's working class and it is a warning to common people of the signs of this betrayal. *Animal Farm* is one of Orwell's works that most clearly illustrates his allegiance to the working class and dedication to the defeat of totalitarianism everywhere.

Orwell's affinity for the working class is clearly illustrated in his sympathetic characterizations of Boxer, Clover and Benjamin. These three characters along with the other "lesser animals" on the farm are depicted in such a way as to draw the reader's sympathy. Boxer is a hard worker, patriotic, a model citizen. He carries out his duty and does everything that is asked of him. He is in the end literally betrayed by being sent to be made into glue. This ultimate betrayal of Boxer is a literal interpretation of a country's leadership's betrayal of those in the working class who need their help the most. Boxer, like a nation's working class, gave all of himself to the betterment of it, here representing

a nation, and in the end is awarded with the ultimate betrayal, being sent to death. While the working class, when past their prime, are not literally sent to death they are often left with less than the means to survive which is a death sentence in and of itself. The pigs' handling of Boxer is symbolic of the way the system works for most working class people. They are given what is necessary to keep them useful to the ruling class. Once their usefulness has ended they are left to die. Clover and Benjamin symbolize those in the working class who see the injustices but are powerless to do anything about it. Their livelihoods lay with the ruling class, the pigs. If they dissent they run the risk of not being fed, or being killed. While Clover takes the injustices in stride and Benjamin takes a cynical stance they are powerless to make a change because of the level of control the ruling class had been allowed to amass. These representations of the working class illustrate Orwell's feelings about them. He championed their cause and felt a need to fight for the rights of the working class because, like Clover and Benjamin, there is too much at risk for them to take on the system on their own.

Besides his sympathy for the working class, Orwell's hatred for totalitarianism is also illustrated in the novel. He shows this with his characterizations of the pigs, specifically Napoleon. What begins as a legitimate, altruistic, revolutionary idea made by Old Major becomes a corrupt, contemptible system in the hands of Napoleon. While there seems to be shades of this corruption immediately following the expelling of the Humans, with the pigs taking the milk for themselves, Snowball is able to keep things fair and in the hands of the workers. However, once Snowball, representing Trotsky, is expelled Napoleon, Stalin, is able to take all the power for himself. He uses propaganda to disseminate rumors and lies about Snowball and to reshape the history of the farm. He



begins on the path toward total corruption. By first making deals with the humans and ultimately becoming friendly with them, wearing clothes and walking on two legs. This symbolizes the deterioration of the Soviet Union during Stalin's reign but also shows the corruption that takes place when power is allowed to be concentrated into the hands of one person. Orwell knew Stalin's work well. He experienced it first hand in the Spanish Civil War when he saw Trotskyist's persecuted by Stalinists through the spreading of rumors and lies, much like the rumors spread by Napoleon in the novel. Because of this first hand knowledge it was easy to create a direct critique of the Soviet Union under Stalin. However, it is clear that the book should be also taken as an outline of warning signs of a corrupt government urging people to be weary of propaganda and to question decisions made by the government, lest they become like the animals on the farm, so oppressed that there is no longer any recourse to be taken. The book should be taken as a critique of corrupt, totalitarian governments of any kind that uses Stalin merely as an example.

Though the majority of the novel is a critique of totalitarianism, Orwell doesn't hold back his critique of capitalism. This critique is less obvious than that of totalitarianism but it is there. It is particularly apparent in the whips and bits that Mr. Jones uses. These represent the methods of oppression used in capitalism. Once Mr. Jones is expelled these are destroyed. They return in the end when Napoleon becomes so thoroughly corrupt that the system of the farm no longer contains any vestiges of communism and has reverted back to its capitalistic form. This is made concrete when Mr. Pilkington remarks, "If you have your lower animals to contend with we have out lower classes!" (136). With this remark it is clear that the farm has restored its capitalist

form. Instead of trying to spread revolution to other farms Napoleon chooses to trade with the humans leading to the extreme corruption of the system created by Old Major. Animalism (communism) gives way to capitalism leaving the animals more oppressed than they were under Jones. By showing this change and the return of the whip at the end of the book, Orwell adds as another element of the novel a critique of capitalism as well. This indicates that he is in no way saying that capitalism is better than communism. He is merely critiquing a system that has gone wrong, not giving up his original socialist ideals and illustrating that his allegiance was to the working class and that he would stand up for them whether they are oppressed by totalitarianism, capitalism or any other system.

*1984* builds on the ideas presented in *Animal Farm* and is a reaction to World War II, revealing Orwell's feelings about the war. It is another book that illustrates his vehement opposition to all forms of totalitarianism and again he uses Stalinist Russia as his model. Like *Animal Farm*, this novel is not anti-communist. It is a critique of the betrayal of a movement and is pro-working class and pro-dissent. The novel functions as a warning to readers of the dangers of allowing the concentration of power to belong to a small ruling class, no matter the economic system.

Orwell was not only drawing on the events in Russia but also on the events in England during the war. His descriptions of the London in the book match up with the war time images of a bombed out London. He writes, "The bombed sites were the plaster dust swirled in the air and the willow herb straggled over the heaps of rubble; and the places where the bombs had cleared a larger path ..." (3). His descriptions of London indicate that he is drawing on the real London of his time. This is evident also in the fact

that England in the scheme of the world has become merely “airstrip one,” suggesting the injured status of England and its greatly reduced power in the world. Even the propaganda posters in the novel are suggestive of those being displayed in England. The infamous “Big Brother is Watching You” posters have a British counter part. The British poster depicts an imposing dark figure with the words “He’s Watching You.” This and other posters like it instilled the fear of being over heard by spies into the people of England. While they are not identical to the posters in the novel they clearly were influential in the creation of the novel’s society controlled by fear and the propaganda methods of the party. The obsession with production in the novel also has counterparts in Orwell’s England. This is also found in propaganda posters of the time. These posters have slogans encouraging people to work harder and produce more in order to achieve victory. In the novel there are constant references to production and people sacrificing for the good of the party. The comparisons to Stalin’s Russia are easy to make but the comparisons to World War II England are clear. Alongside the criticism of Stalin’s regime, is a harsh criticism of the culture of fear created by the British government during the war. What is evident is that while Orwell had no tolerance for totalitarianism, he also would not stand for a society controlled by propaganda and fear created by any kind of ruling system.

These criticisms of England makes clear Orwell’s urging of dissent against any government that oppresses its people. Particularly significant is Winston’s first act of rebellion, writing. Orwell writes, “To mark the paper was the decisive act” (7). It is not a coincidence that this is the first act of dissent in the novel. For Orwell, writing was his primary mode of dissent and his politics were never far from his writing. Winston is the

messenger of Orwell's politics in this case and this is indicated in his using writing to begin his dissent. By using writing as his mode of dissent and then having Winston begin with this same form of protest Orwell is suggesting that people use whatever mode available to them to fight tyranny, to use what skills you have at your disposal. For Winston what he had was writing, sex, and his mental protest against Big Brother. His protests were limited to his means. Through Winston, Orwell is urging people to do what they can to fight against oppression. Winston writes in his journal, "Freedom is the freedom to say that two plus two make four. If that is granted, all else follows" (81). This indicates that freedom is the ability to think for your self. Once thought and expression is limited there is no real freedom. It is this type of oppression that Orwell was fighting against with his writing.

In this book, Orwell's affinity for the working class is once again illustrated. Even though Winston is a party member he is described as having the life of a working class person. However, where the allegiance really is evident is in Winston's mantra of, "If there is hope it lies with the proles." Winston sees that the hope for rebellion is with the working class and not in those in the party. For the people in the party there is little room for rebellion other than the small rebellions made by Winston and Julia. The proles, like the British working class, have what the party members don't have, numbers. If they were to get together in organized rebellion they could make a real change, but both Orwell, the writer, and Winston, the character, see that the obstacle that lies in the way of rebellion is apathy. The proles in the book are content with bad pop songs and cheap beer and don't care that their government is lying to them and controlling them. *1984*, along with encouraging dissent is also a warning to readers of the dangers of

apathy. Winston is defeated at the end, not because there is no hope in changing the world at all, but because apathy has replaced engagement and there is no way for him to energize the masses.

All three of these novels indicate Orwell's feelings about the government, and its response to World War II. By aligning himself with ordinary, working class figures Orwell is placing on them the hope for dissent and the hope for change. His criticisms of Stalin are there to provide criticism not only of Stalin, but of tyranny in any form. They are not limited to one man or one system they extend to the British government's fear campaigns during World War II which were evident in their propaganda which instilled in people the fear of talking to strangers about the war. This kind of propaganda is not only a tool to protect the country against spies but it separates people and quells dissent. If people are afraid to talk to each other they can't build movements and create rebellion. Orwell saw this for what it was and, as always, pointed it out. His novels and essays were meant to be accessible to ordinary people. He did not set out to create works of art; the form of the novel was merely a way for him to get his political ideas across to general public. He did this by mixing in common themes with political messages in hopes of sparking dissent among readers. *1984*, his last book, is his final warning of the dangers of apathy and complacency. Even though Winston succumbs to the propaganda in the end he still stood up and should inspire others to do the same.

Like Orwell, J.B. Priestly used his novels as vehicles for his political beliefs and attempted to inspire dissent through them. Priestly was also a socialist, though he never formally belonged to any party, and these beliefs come out in his writings which, like Orwell's, champion the working class and are skeptical of industry, the rich, and

government. His war time novels deal more directly with the war than Orwell's but the effect is the same. They offer criticism of the government and aim to energize working people to action. Of the three books I will deal with in this section *Let the People Sing* is most directly about the empowerment of ordinary people. It follows a rag tag group made up of an out of work comedian, a refugee professor, a traveling auctioneer and his niece who incite rebellion in a small town that is being taken over by capitalism and the ruling class.

The main conflict of the novel is a music hall that was willed to the people of Dunbury. When the characters arrive in Dunbury the people's control of the hall is being threatened by the United Plastics Company, an American company, who wants to turn the hall into a product showroom, and the city's upper-class who want the hall to become a museum dedicated to the history of Dunbury. What is clearly missing from the equation is the input of the people themselves. The attitudes of the people that run the factory are indicative of the attitudes of capitalists in general. They believe that you "Can't have a civilization without continually raising the standard of living. Can't raise the standard of living without increasing production and consumption of goods" (188). These two sentences contain many of the problems of capitalism within them. They are the belief that civilization is based on production that increased consumption indicates an increase in the standard of living, and the fact that the owners of the factory are deciding what is best for the workers. Once again the people are absent from these statements and an elite few are declaring what is good and bad for them. Along with this is the belief that having more stuff makes for a better standard of living that neglects to take all other parts of life into account when determining how good of a life a person is living. The

professor points out the problems with this way of thinking. He says, “your world with its clamorous and exacting machines and its organization of mechanical little tasks, is draining away their spirit of initiative, making them passive in their leisure instead of active and creative” (191). This is the main problem of capitalism people are turned into machines and become passive their alienation from their work creates an alienation from the world around them and each other making them powerless to see the injustices being forced upon them. In the novel it takes the outside force of Timmy and the Professor to awaken the people to action, suggesting that it takes an outside force to awaken the people and to create a movement.

Along with the factory owners the ruling class of the wealthy are also targets of Priestley’s criticism. They want to turn the town music hall into a museum to honor the history of Dunbury. In other words their desire is to create a museum which honors the upper crust of Dunbury and they don’t care if they must take the people’s only true possession to do so. They don’t see the people of the town worthy of consulting about this decision and see their only obstacle as the plastics company. They consider themselves “the local people who matter” which discounts the majority of people living in the town (157). Because they have money, they have power. This is a flaw in the capitalist system that Priestley is not subtle about pointing out. The factory and the upper class are characterized as selfish and inconsiderate of the working classes needs and wants. The upper class wants a museum to honor them and the factory owners want a showroom to make more money. Both leave the working people out of the decision making process.

The Professor functions as the voice of reason in the book. He understands the plight of the working class and the need for them to be included in the decisions of the town. He sees the need for rebellion and the unrest of the working people. He says, “We should aim at making all men great, privileged and wealthy...” (193). He believes in the power of the people and sees their struggle. He understands that when provoked they will rebel. He tells the factory owners, “its roots are frustration and despair. Its fruits are violence, cruelty and anguish. And the bowls and cups you sell – the bowls and cups for whose sake you would destroy music and the liberty and happiness of the common people – may soon be running with blood and tears” (195). The Professor functions as a prophetic voice before the eventual strike at the factory and occupation of the music hall. He knows the power of the people when they work as a mass and not as individuals. The fact that the people ultimately beat the ruling class and the industry people indicates that Priestley sees this potential as well.

In the novel Priestley sets up the rich and the capitalist system as enemies and this theme continues throughout the other novels. These novels deal directly with World War II and further illustrate his suspicion of the rich and his allegiance to the working people of England. They also display his criticism of the way the British government handled the home front during the war. Like Orwell, he is critical of the culture of fear that had been created amongst the people. In *Blackout in Gretley* he uses the story of Humphrey Neyland, a man working as an agent of the government to capture spies, to illustrate the issues with the British handling with the war and the suspicions he has of the upper classes.



At the beginning of the novel Neyland is able to get into an arms factory with nothing but a letter from the agency. Priestley uses this to illustrate his skepticism of the country's security. He writes, "that anybody who spoke English and didn't wear the Iron Cross too conspicuously only needed one phony letter of introduction to be able to see everything we'd got in ease and comfort" (24). Significant here is his choice of words 'too conspicuously.' It isn't as long as they didn't wear the Iron Cross it's as long as they didn't make their allegiances readily known. Implying that he felt the government would allow a certain level of Fascism to exist. Placing this early on in the novel sets a tone of suspicion towards the government through out the book. Soon after the guide Neyland is with at the factory mentions that a worker at the plant is on a "dangerous list" because he's a Communist (26). The inclusion of this right after being able to get into the plant with just a phony letter is interesting because it suggests that there is more concern about dissent among the worker and fear of the left then there is worry about the security of the plant from outsiders. If they will go so far as create a list of employees that are a threat to the plant, a threat in the sense that they may incite the workers to start a union or rebel against the plant's system, then why is it that someone can walk in off the street with a letter and see the whole plant. It brings up the issue of where the priorities really are, protecting the safety of the plant or protecting the interests of those who run it?

What is also significant in this novel is that the spies turn out to be members of the upper class. Priestly chose to do this for a reason. The novel seems to indicate that he felt the upper classes would be more likely to succumb to Nazi propaganda than the working class because they have more to lose. In the novel Neyland reflects that, "But the really difficult and dangerous people are the ones who sell out because they believe in

the Fascist idea. Sometimes, of course [...] they think only the Nazis can help them to keep their power or money or both [...] and all of 'em just hate the democratic idea, and despise ordinary folk" (69). It is only the upper classes who have power and money and here, through Neyland, Priestley is aligning those with power and money as being susceptible to Nazi ideas. He is suggesting that it is not the working class talking and spreading information that is the real worry but the rich falling prey to the promises of Fascism.

This suspicion of the ruling class continues throughout the novel. When Neyland goes to see a member of Parliament speak he says that the man "blamed us because, he said, we didn't realize this was our war, but at the same time he gave us to understand that the war really belonged to him and a few friends of his in Westminster" (105). World War II was touted to be 'a people's war' but what Priestley is suggesting here is that it wasn't. That in reality it was the ruling class using the people to further their own interests.

This novel also sets up Priestley's vision for the post-war years. He does this in the character of Mr. Perigo, who turns out to be another agent. Throughout the novel Perigo has a certain insight into the way the war is being run and isn't particularly fond of it. About the end of the war he says,

This country has the choice, during the next two years, of coming fully to life and beginning all over again or of rapidly decaying and dying on the same old feet. It can only accomplish the first by taking a firm grip on about fifty thousand important, influential, gentlemanly persons and telling them firmly to shut up and

do nothing is they don't want to be put to doing some most unpleasant work  
(164).

Here Priestley indicates that he sees the need for change after the war and that the change is not going to come from the rich ruling class. It is implied that the change will come from the people and that if the ruling class knows what's good for them; they'll stay out of it. It seems that this passage reveals Priestley's real hope for the future of England. That the working class will take control, indicated in the fact that Neyland takes on the persona of an engineer to rid the country of Fascist spies who are all upper class. The novel displays an intense distrust of rule by the rich and a desire to see that changed.

*Three Men in New Suits*, deals with what is to be done after the war. The novel is the story of three men coming home to England after fighting in the war. Herbert returns to his family farm, Eddie is a laborer and returns to his cottage and Alan, who comes from the upper class, returns to his manor house. The novel shows how conditions in England function to attempt to break up their friendship which had been forged on the battle field as soldiers.

Due to their experiences at the front, the men all see the need for change. They understand that England can not go on the way it has always been because then there would be no purpose to their sacrifice. They feel that something must come out of the destruction in order to make it worth while. They learned in battle that unity is the only way to make things work. Herbert illustrates this in his reflections of fighting alongside Alan, "He had a fancy for staying with the chaps he knew" (34). Alan could have become an officer but he refused the commission in order to stay with the men he was with. This indicates the men understand that in order to win they had to stick together

instead of working towards individual glory. Coming home from the front they have a desire to see this take place in everyday life as well. But the fact of coming home is that life was how they left it. Alan's life is easy he gets offered a newspaper job just because of his class while Herbert and Eddie have to deal with the hardships of life. By illustrating this dichotomy Priestley is condemning it. He sees that this is an unfair set up and that something must be done to change it.

When they get home to England they see that the rigid class structure is already working itself back out. Alan gets offered a job with a newspaper while Eddie finds his life in shambles and Herbert goes back to a life on the family farm. This stratification only serves to separate people. It puts the farmers and the factory workers at odds with each other and them both at odds with the upper class. Herbert sees the hypocrisy in the stratification and in the anti-communist sentiments. He says. "A lot of places I've been in, the people you call Reds took over because they were the people who's been against the Nazis all the time – see? And the other sort of people, who were frightened of the Reds, had been collaborating with the Nazis – so they were out. That's how it was over there" (39). He sees the anti-communist rhetoric for what it is, a way to divide people. That in fact they have more in common with the communists than they want to let on.

The novel is filled with people attempting to create divisions amongst people. When the men who have fought the war comment on the state of the country people are quick to try and contradict them but they stand strong in their convictions. Even Alan, who is of the upper class, maintains a kind of solidarity with his fellow soldiers. During the war they were all soldiers and they were all in the same predicament. Because of this Alan sees what is wrong with his class and doesn't take the newspaper job. He tells the

other men that the upper classes have, “power and they mean to keep it, until we give them a damned bad fright” (144). He uses the word ‘we’ implying his solidarity with the working class. He has turned on his class because he sees what is wrong with it. Alan serves as the ideal upper class person who by working alongside the working class denounces his class and creates an allegiance with the working class. By writing this into the novel Priestley is making the suggestion that it is possible to get members of the ruling class on to the side of the working class and that this is what is needed to reshape the face of country. He tells his sister,

We’re no useless, we’re not finished, after all we’re people too [...] But we must think of ourselves just as people. We must go along the main road and not crawl up blind alleys. We mustn’t try to save something special for ourselves that the mass of people mustn’t have. That the mistake the collaborators made in the occupied countries—and we saw some of ‘em being carted off [...] They joined hands with death simply to try and keep something for themselves (148).

Alan sees the change that needs to be made. There needs to be an evening of the classes. No more rich people and poor people, just people. He understands that all people share a common experience and that there is no reason for them to fight amongst themselves.

In these three novels Priestley illustrates his belief in a united country, one where the working class is no longer exploited and the upper classes no longer exploit. Where there is no longer upper and lower classes just people. He urges people to unite, as workers, as people, as citizens and work for better conditions and a better life. His novels work to educate readers about what the reality of their country is and how it can be made better. There is an urging to dissent and action and he has a clear vision of what the

future of England should be. What he wants is for the destruction of war to be turned into a way to improve the country and not function as a division.

Both Orwell and Priestley saw World War II as a time where there was a possibility for change and even during war time urged dissent and the questioning of the government. They had the desire to see the people unite to create a country for the people and saw that war was no excuse for the people to become complacent.

Complacency leads to tyranny and both authors urged people to rise up against tyranny of any kind whether it came from Nazis or the British government. Both writers also saw the faults in capitalism and understood the possibilities for a better world under socialism.

These authors used their craft for a societal purpose. Their writings were meant to be used as vehicles to get the ideas of socialism to the people and to incite thought and dissent amongst them. These novels were the attempt by these authors to educate the people about the injustices and warn them of the consequences of allowing them to continue. By using the form of the novel, something that was accessible to all people they hoped to get their ideas to a mass of people and appeal to everyone and not just a small intellectual class. They saw that dissent goes beyond theories and must be encouraged in the mass of people and should not be limited to an educated few.

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